

THE HUMAN PERSON IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND ISLAM: IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Introduction

It is only appropriate that the theme of this year's conference is the Conceptualization of the Human Person in the Social Sciences. In his lifetime, the Holy Father, John Paul II, had made the human person the center of his apostolic mission. He championed human dignity, human rights, social justice and the right to life.

This paper aims at examining the perspectives of two major religions in Southeast Asia – Theravada Buddhism and Islam – on the nature of the human person, and how such perspectives influence governance and politics in the region. In writing this paper, I find inspiration in the inaugural sermon of our newly installed Holy Father, Benedict XVI, who assured followers of other religions that 'the Church wants to continue to weave an open and sincere dialogue with them, in the search for the true good of the human being and of society'.

First of all, it is necessary for us to clarify the use of the term 'religion' as used in this paper. We are not adopting the strict definition of religion provided by Emile Durkheim: 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim, 1965: 62)'.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha proffered a philosophy and a way of life, and did not found a Church as such. Islam, for its part, does not have a single 'Church' that interprets its textual as well as its contextual doctrines. But to the extent that both Buddhism and Islam have 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things', we shall, for the purpose of this paper, refer to them as religions.

The scope of our study includes the Southeast Asian countries that are predominantly Theravada Buddhist and Muslim. The region of Southeast Asia is composed of eleven countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam. All these countries, except Timor Leste, are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Four countries are predominantly Theravada Buddhist: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. Theravada (*Thera*: Elders; *Vada*: Doctrine) Buddhism subscribes to the original teachings of the Buddha, which are recorded in the Pali scriptures. Theravada Buddhism originated in India, and its seat was Sri Lanka, formerly called Ceylon, which is located in South Asia. It is also known as Southern Buddhism.

Mahayana or Northern Buddhism arose out of a schism within the ranks of Buddhist monastic leaders in the first century A.D. Mahayana Buddhists refer to Theravada Buddhism as Hinayana (lesser vehicle) Buddhism. The adherents of Mahayana (greater vehicle) Buddhism abound in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Vietnam and Singapore and among ethnic Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia.

Three countries in Southeast Asia are predominantly Muslim: Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia. Confucianism has a dominant influence in Vietnam and Singapore. It is only the Philippines and Timor Leste that have a Christian majority. Christian minorities are found in other Southeast Asian countries, the most sizeable of whom are in Indonesia. There are Muslim minorities in Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, and Hindu minorities in Malaysia, Indonesia and Myanmar.

Recent events have focused attention on the rise of 'political Islam' in the region. Developments in Southern Thailand, Indonesia and Southern Philippines have aroused interest in the role religious differences play in domestic as well as cross-border politics. There have also arisen a few incidents involving territorial disputes as well as political tensions among neighboring countries. But the countries concerned have managed to contain conflict situations.

Their being members of ASEAN is not a coincidence. A culture of peace has prevailed in the ASEAN region, which has not witnessed an internecine war since the end of the Vietnam War thirty years ago. Even when the issue was bilateral in nature, ASEAN instruments for peaceful resolution of conflict, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, the Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone, and the Zone of

Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration have put in place international norms and practices that have maintained peace and stability in the region.

The culturalist framework of analysis used in studying East Asian politics (Pye, 1985; Neher and Marlay, 1995; Vatikiotis, 1996; Jones, 1997) asserts the dominance of traditional cultural values – which, in large measure, are derived from religious principles – in determining patterns of political behavior and the structure of political institutions. Such patterns are characterized as rigidly paternalistic, hierarchical and personalistic – qualities that have a bearing on the pace and character of democratization and the development of civil society.

Samuel Huntington claims that ‘virtually no tradition of human rights against the state exists in East Asia; to the extent that individual rights are recognized, they are viewed as rights created by the state (Huntington, 1993: 38-39)’. He finds that the maintenance of order and respect for hierarchy are central values in the political culture, with harmony and cooperation preferred over disagreement and competition.

Kishore Mahbubani (2004: 86) believes that there is no unified Asian view on human rights: ‘Predictably, there is a whole range of reactions, ranging from those who subscribe to these concepts in toto to those who reject them completely.. But in most Asian societies there is little awareness, let alone understanding, of these concepts. The truth is that the vast continent of Asia, preoccupied with more immediate challenges, has not had the time or energy to address these issues squarely (*Ibid.*)’.

This paper does not agree with Huntington that East Asia has no tradition of human rights. Our discussion of Theravada Buddhism and Islam will show that these two religions respect life, the value and dignity of human persons, their individual rights as well as their universal equality.

1. THERAVADA BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF MAN

The primary reference for this section is Bhikkhu Kondaniya of the Vajirarama Monastery in Sri Lanka. He was this author’s mentor on Theravada Buddhism way back in 1969 and his explanations of its teachings was this author’s main source material for his work on the social and political prescriptions of Theravada Buddhism (Villacorta, 1973).

One must examine the Theravada Buddhist concept of the human person in the context of its cosmology. Buddhism starts with the premise that life is tied to *samsara*, the continuous and inescapable cycle of birth, death

and rebirth. Cosmic order is an intricate pattern of eternal alteration between change and sameness, progression and regression. Every occurrence or being, therefore, is only a flash, an illusion. We must detach ourselves from this illusory world (*loka*) because it is that which causes suffering. The *Dhammapada* quotes the Buddha as saying: 'Come, look at this world, glittering like a royal chariot; The foolish are immersed in it, but the wise do not touch it'.

In Buddhism, there is no concept of the origin of life. Proceeding from impermanence is the absence of the 'self' or non-egoity (*anatta*). In his momentary state of existence, man is composed of five unreal elements (*pancakkhanda*): body, feelings, perceptions, impulses and emotions, and acts of consciousness (Nyanaponika Thera, 1981). There is no 'I' as such, identity being only a product of a succession of causes, a complex compound of fleeting mental states. 'Being' is always 'becoming'. Dependent origination (*patticasamuppada*) is governed by the law of *kamma*, which is the totality of one's actions in successive states of existence that determine his fate in the next (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1992).

The egalitarian orientation of Theravada Buddhism proceeds from its concept of non-egoity. The Buddha was quoted in the *Sutta Nipata* as saying:

By birth is not one an outcast,
By birth is not one a Brahmin,
By deeds is one an outcast,
By deeds is one a Brahmin (Narada Thera, 1964: 307).

Men and women are not judged based on their status but based on individual merit. The Buddha welcomed representatives of all castes and genders into his fold: Upali, the barber; Sunita, the scavenger; Sati, the fisherman's son; Ambapali, the courtesan; Rajjumala and Puna, the slave girls. All of them were admitted to the monastic community (*Sangha*) with equal reverence and later, were given the honor of becoming chief disciples (*arahat*).

2. ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF MAN

Let us now discuss the Islamic view of the human person. The Qur'an states that Allah is the only Creator and is, therefore, the Master of everyone's destiny. He created every being for a definite purpose and his worshippers ask Him only to guide them onto the right path (Doi, 1998: 65).

Al Hijr (15): 28-29 describes the creation of Adam, the first human being:
Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to create man from sounding clay from mud moulded into shape; When I have fash-

ioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him’.

This passage, which is the first direct revelation to Prophet Muhammad, demonstrates the omnipotence of God and attributes mortality to man (because God made him out of clay) as well as a supreme status of man among all his creatures (because God has breathed His spirit into him).

Ordered by God to fall down in obeisance to man, the angels prostrated before Adam, except for the head of the angels, Iblis. He argued that he could not prostrate himself to one who was merely ‘from mud moulded into shape’ (*Al Hijr* (15): 30-33). Thereupon, God turned Iblis away and cast a curse on him. But the latter succeeded in asking for reprieve till the Day of Judgment. In the meantime, Iblis, who became the embodiment of evil, has been spending his time seducing humans into committing sin (*Al Hijr* (15): 34-44; *Al Baqarah* (2): 30-39). Man’s God-given power to think and reason conveys Islam’s message of the basic unity of mankind and repudiates the idea of the multiple ancestry of man. *Al Nisa’* (4): 1 expresses this concept of the equality of men and oneness of humanity: ‘O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; – reverence God, through Whom ye demand mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for God ever watches over you’.

The *Qur’an* states that God has created man ‘in the best of moulds (*taqwim*)’ such that angels had to make obeisance to him. *Al Tin* (95): 4-6 affirms that the constitution of man is perfect but one’s nature can be debased if he loses his faith and does not lead a good life: ‘We have indeed created man in the best of moulds, Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, Except such as believe and do righteous deeds: for they shall have a reward unailing’.

The process of man’s creation has symbolic meaning for Muslims. Even if man is intelligent and rational because God breathed His spirit on him, he is also innocent and vulnerable, having been created out of clay. Man’s vulnerability was demonstrated when Adam succumbed to temptation. The *Qur’an* describes God’s mercy when He took pity on Adam and gave guidance to him and his descendants (*Al Baqarah* (2): 35-39; *Sarah* (20): 122-123). Man’s shield against evil deeds and eternal damnation is total submission to God, which is the meaning of the word ‘Islam’.

The question of whether man has free will or is completely bound by predestination was the subject of debate since the first centuries of Islam.

A group called the Qadariyya, which was influenced by the theologian al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), posited that man was essentially free to choose between either faith in and obedience to God or rebellion and infidelity to God (Riddell, 2003: 24). The Qadariyya cited such passages from the Qur'an as *Ibrahim* (14): 27: '... but God will leave, to stray, those who do wrong'. On the other hand, those who opposed them averred that man is under the absolute control of God and is subject to His predetermined order. They referred to such Qur'anic statements as *Al Ra'd* (13): 27: 'Truly God leaveth, to stray, whom He will (*Ibid.*: 25)'.

In the 10th century, the reformist thinker al-Ash'ari offered a middle course: man can choose between options provided by God, with God knowing beforehand what options would be chosen (*Ibid.*: 27). The debate on predestination versus free will continues to this day. Many contemporary Muslim scholars endeavor to provide a balanced standpoint that comes close to the explanation given by al-Ash'ari (*Ibid.*: 28-29).

Professor Abdur Al-Rahman I. Doi describes the test that man undergoes: 'Allah has created man of the best stature and in the best mould. But, in spite of all this, when a man makes the wrong use of his opportunity and misuses his free-will, Allah causes him to return to the lowest of the low (*Ibid.*: 73)'.

Divine justice is meted out in this world and finally, on the Day of Judgment. Resurrection after death is part of Islamic doctrine. The Qur'an mandates that the goal of man on earth is the assimilation of divine attributes. These attributes consist of goodness, truthfulness, justice, forgiveness, virtuous personal conduct and decent social behavior. Man's duties include his obligations not only towards his Creator but also towards himself and his fellow human beings (Doi, 1998: 113). In order to achieve this, Islam does not require renunciation of this world. Instead, it prescribes coordination of the spiritual and material aspects of life. *Al Qasas* (28): 77 admonishes: 'But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world; do thou good, as God has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land; for God loves not those who do mischief'.

Forgiveness and compassion for one's fellowmen are deeply rooted in Islam: 'Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; - for God loves those who do good (*Ali 'Imran* (3): 134)'. 'Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. God is free of all wants, and He is most Forbearing (*Al Baqarah* (2): 263)'.

Islam requires regular charity for the poor (*Al Baqarah* (2): 43, 110, 177, 277; *Al Nisa* (4): 162; *Al Ma'idah* I(5): 55). A worshipper who 'repulses the orphan (with harshness) and encourages not the feeding of the indigent' is censured (*Al Ma'un* (107): 1-7).

Muslims are expected to set the highest standard in uprightness, piety and decency for the world. They must follow the example of Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Allah and the epitome of the perfect man by whose standard the rest of mankind will be measured on the Day of Judgment (Doi, 1998: 148). *Al Hajj* (22): 78 highlights the role of Muslims: 'And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive, (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the cult of your father Abraham. It is He Who has named you Muslims, but before and in (Revelation); that the Messenger be a witness for you, and that ye be witnesses for mankind! So establish regular prayer, give regular charity, and hold fast to God! He is your Protector – the Best to protect and the Best to help'.

3. THERAVADA BUDDHIST AND ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON HUMAN GOVERNANCE

Having examined the conceptualization of the human person in the two religions, we shall proceed to discuss the scriptural teachings on human governance. Concepts of the ideal state proceed from fundamental premises on the human person.

For Theravada Buddhism, the ideal state is one which creates conditions for men and women to over-ride their *kamma* of the past and ensure the accumulation of merit that would improve their *kamma* for their next lives, thus bringing them closer to *Nibbana*. For Islam, the goal of governance is facilitating the realization of God's design for every human person, enabling him to fulfill his obligations to God and supporting him in treading the moral path. Both religions regard the state as having an escathological function: that of helping mankind achieve salvation.

3.1 *The Buddha-Raja and the Cakkavati*

The Buddhist text, *Cakkavatti-Sihanada-sutta*, describes the deterioration of society due to rulers' disregard for public welfare. Economic deprivation spread and led to evil and vice, which eventually gave way to destruction. Men lost their reason and selfishness prevailed. Boundary lines were

set; food was stored; many stole their neighbor's share. Stealing caused violence, lying, foul speech, and immorality. In the midst of this chaos, men began to seek stability (Jayatille, 1967: 524). They decided to select among themselves a wise and virtuous ruler, to whose authority they would submit themselves in return for order and justice in society.

This Buddhist contribution to political theory antedated the social contract theory of Locke and Rosseau. It implies the obligation of rulers to serve the good of their citizens and of mankind. The only limitation is the requirement that the collective will must conform to the universal law of righteousness (*Dhamma*). The *Digha-nikaya* sets as the primary aim of the welfare state the care and protection of every inhabitant, man or animal. The *Anguttara-nikaya* gives an account of the Buddha's discourse with the Licchavis on the Vijjian confederacy. The Vijjian state recognized due process, public assembly, equal justice and other basic human rights. The government also held traditional respect for ancient statutes and institutions, and protected the aged, women, holy men and religious establishments. Showing his appreciation for the way their affairs of state were conducted, the Buddha said that as long as the Vijjians continued to uphold their social and political traditions, they will not suffer decline (*Ibid.*: 85).

The state must ensure that crime is abated by removing the causes of social evil – avarice and poverty. This move must be supplemented by the training of the populace in the right values. There is a need for an organized distribution of wealth (*dana-samibhaga*). This can be implemented, for instance, through a taxation policy in which the king, during bad harvests, reduces taxes or helps the farmers to pay them. The last duty of the state is that its laws and policies must be based on the *Dhamma*. The *Digha-nikaya* prescribes that the ruler must consult religious teachers and philosophers, to ensure that the creation of favorable social and political conditions would provide opportunities for *Nibbana* for everyone. The ruler must uphold the *Dhamma* by providing the example of righteousness to his subjects and guiding them toward the path of righteousness and salvation.

In dealing with other countries, the value of peace and tolerance is intrinsic in the social philosophy of Theravada Buddhism. It derives itself from the Buddha's compassion for all beings and his recognition of universal equality which are contained in the Buddhist texts – *Dhammapada*, *Samyutta-nikaya*, *Anguttara-nikaya* and *Majjima-nikaya*.

Like Prophet Muhammad, the Buddha had experience in actually mediating a dispute involving states. Not having been contented with merely preaching peace and non-violence, he went to the battlefield to personally

reconcile the Sakyas and Koliyas, who were feuding over the Rahini River. He admonished them to give more regard for human life than for such an insignificant matter as the ownership of the river waters.

The Buddha never found wars of aggression favorable whether culminating in victory or in defeat. The *Samyutta-nikaya* recounts the Buddha's admonition to King Kosala, who was defeated by his nephew King Ajatasattu:

Conquest engenders hate; the conquered live
In misery. But whoso is at peace
And passionless, happily doth he live;
Conquest hath he abandoned and defeat! (*Ibid.*: 200-201)

Theravada Buddhism maintains that both the cause and result of aggressive war are immorality and social decadence. *Avihimsa* (non-violence) springs from *akrodaya* (non-ill will). The *Majjhima-nikaya* says that no man is justified in killing even while fighting as a dutiful citizen for his country or for a noble cause. Instead of gaining salvation for himself after death, the *Samyutta-nikaya* quoted the Buddha as saying that the combatant will find himself reborn in a miserable condition.

The first ruler to consciously apply *Dhamma* to actual political practice was Asoka Maurya, the great emperor of India (Anuradha Seneviratna, 1994). After his conversion to Buddhism, he established the first welfare state in the world which recognized the equality of everyone under the common brotherhood of the *Dhamma*. He ordered the inscription of a series of edicts which embodied his rule of righteousness and justice. The edicts were read aloud to his subjects to spread the message of the *Dhamma*. He ordered 'for the enjoyment of man and beast' the erection of hospitals, rest house, and watering places, the planting of shade trees and the digging of wells. To ensure the spiritual well-being of his realm, he was said to have built numerous monasteries and some 80,000 stupas and supported 64,000 monks.

Asoka formed groups called *Dhamma Mahammatras* which were delegated the special function of promoting morality. Reporters were posted everywhere to regularly report to him the problems of his people. His ideal society was said to have been pervaded with mutual love, not only between him and his subjects, but also between elders and children, masters and slaves, monks and followers. The social philosophy of love and brotherhood was not confined to his realm. Asoka was the first monarch recorded in history ever to renounce war (Soma Thera, 1962: 20). He enjoined the neighboring kingdoms to abandon artificial barriers which separated men and states. It was because of the example of his virtuous and benevolent socie-

ty that Buddhism found favor among the many countries which were converted during his reign.

Asoka became the exemplar of Buddhist governance. The earliest Buddhist chronicle of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), the *Mahavamsa*, describes virtuous monarchs as '... men of good understanding, who have conquered pride and indolence, and have freed themselves from the attachment of lust, when they have attained to great power, without working harm to the people, delighting in deeds or merit, rejoicing in faith, do many and various pious works (Geiger, 1960: 245)'.

The contractual and paternalistic basis of kingship later assumed the more exalted concept of the universal ruler (*cakkavati samkha*) which was to transform the idea of the king as a father into one who identified his rule with the will of the heavens.

This concept of the universal ruler was influenced by the Hindu idea of the *mahapurusa cakravartin*, the celestial monarch who turns the Wheel of the Law and reigns universally. It is mentioned in the *Cakkavati-Sihanada-sutta*, the *Maha-sudassana-sutta*, and the *Ambattha-suttanta* of the *Digha-nikaya* (Rhys Davids, 1921: Part II, 192-199; Part IV, 59-71). Gautama Buddha was pictured in the *Lakkhasa-sutta* as one who was given the choice between universal kingship and supreme Buddhahood (*Ibid.*: Part III, 137). He chose the latter, but after his death, he prepared for his future role as the ideal world monarch.

The original meaning of *Bodhisatta* as one about to reach enlightenment was to acquire another significance, i.e., one who is to become the Savior – *Buddha-Metteyya*. According to Buddhist messianic thought, the world will reach its peak of disillusionment and moral decay 4,000 years after Buddha's death. The Buddha will then reappear as *Metteyya* (Sanskrit: *Maitreya*), the deity residing in heaven. The latter will come down to earth, 'abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, and Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now (*Ibid.*: Part III, 73)'.

Assuming the role of a *cakkavati samkha*, he 'turns the Wheel of the Law', in the sense of placing the world under the unifying moral influence of the universal law of righteousness, the *Dhamma*. He is to rule justly and mercifully; unequalled generosity will be demonstrated by him by renouncing his wealth and power, distributing his treasures to the poor, homeless and destitute. The *Anguttara-nikaya* adds that the universal emperor will establish a 'kingless authority' (*arajaka cakka*), with the *Dhamma* reigning supreme (Jayatilleke, 1967: 539).

The *Cakkavati-Bodhisatta-Metteyya* tradition was not only associated with Gautama Buddha, but was later to apply to subsequent rulers of the Theravada countries. Before the concept of *Buddha-rajā* came to Southeast Asia, it was developed in Ceylon around 6 A.D., when the *cakkavati* ideal was incorporated into the kingship (Nicholas and Paranavitana, 1961: 171). After 12 A.D., this ideal was further propagated in later inscriptions and writings of royal patronage (Arasaratnam, 1964: 54). In pre-Buddhistic South and Southeast Asia, kings, who were then within the pale of Hinduism, were already considered of divine nature. The introduction of Buddhism gave them an added attribute: that of the living *Bodhisatta* (an enlightened being who postpones *Nibbana* in order to guide humanity towards the right path). These rulers used the concept to its fullest advantage either in legitimizing and preserving their power. The realization of the ideal Buddhist society became the aspiration of Theravada Buddhist kings who expected to become the *Metteyya* in their future lives.

3.2. Interpretations of the Islamic Approach to Governance

I am especially grateful to my former student at Ohio University, Professor Bahtiar Effendy of the University of Indonesia (UI) and the Islamic State University (UIN), for his elucidation on political Islam. His book, *Islam and the State in Indonesia* (2003), is one of the most authoritative sources on the subject.

Effendy analyzes the 'polyinterpretability' of Islam as applied to political theory:

Religion, as some have argued, may be seen as a divine instrument to understand the world. Islam – in comparison with other religions – is conceivably the one with the least difficulty in accepting such a premise. An obvious reason lies in one of Islam's most conspicuous characteristics: its 'omnipresence'. This is a notion which recognizes that 'everywhere' the presence of Islam should provide 'the right moral attitude for human action'. This notion has led many adherents to believe that Islam is a total way of life. The embodiment of this is expressed in the *shari'a* (Islamic Law). A sizeable group of Muslims even push it further, asserting that 'Islam is an integrated totality that offers a solution to all problems of life' (Effendy, 2003: 34).

However, Effendy thinks that different intellectual inclinations in understanding the *shari'a* may lead to different interpretations of that doctrine: 'The emergence of a number of different schools of thought in

Islamic jurisprudence or various theological and philosophical streams, for instance, shows that Islamic teachings are polyinterpretable. The interpretive nature of Islam has functioned as the basis of Islamic flexibility in history. In addition, it also confirms the necessity of pluralism in Islamic tradition. Therefore, as many have argued, Islam could not and should not be perceived as monolithic (*Ibid.*: 5).

Peter Riddell (2003) describes the tendency to adhere to the unity of faith and practice in Islamic thinking: 'The life of a Muslim is traditionally governed by the twin science of Theology and Law. Theology provides a framework for religious belief, while Law provides a framework for actions. Law plays the primary role, and the Islamic sacred law, the *shari'a*, differs greatly from western ideas of law. First and primarily, it is much wider in its application, for it includes all human action in its scope: public and private actions, national and international situations, as well as the details of religious ritual and the ethics of social conduct. Second, the *shari'a* differs fundamentally from western law in that it is not man-made, according to Muslim belief, but is considered by Muslims to be grounded on divine revelation as revealed to the prophet Muhammad (Riddell, 2003: 50)'.

In the 10th century, the leading four schools of law were consolidated and have survived in Sunni Islam (*Ibid.*: 54-55):

1. Hanafi school: originated in Iraq and has the most numerous followings found in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, India and Turkish Central Asia.. Position: the use of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) has priority. Founded by Imam Abu Hanifa (699-765).
2. Maliki school: developed in Medina and popular in North and West Africa and Upper Egypt. Position: there is no overriding authority from the *Hadith* accounts (narrations about the life of the Prophet). Founded by Imam Malik Ibn Anas (714-796).
3. Shafi'i school: strong presence in Lower Egypt, Hijaz, South Arabia, East Africa, coastal parts of India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Position: any authentic tradition of the proven practices of Prophet Muhammad, including the *sunna*, is authoritative and is a valid source of the *fiqh* (legal rulings of the Muslim scholars). Founded by Imam Shafi (767-820).
4. Hanbali school: prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Position: Tradition has priority over *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). Founded by Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal (780-855).

In the contemporary world, there have emerged four categories of Muslim responses to the pressures and demands of modernity:

1. Traditionalists: maintain a continuum between the past and the present, with the past serving as guide to deal with present issues.
2. Radical Islamists: call for a reinterpretation of the present through a recreation of the past, a return to a model Medina-type community such as that established by Prophet Muhammad, with the *Qur'an* and the *Sunna* as the central points of reference.
3. Modernists: advocate the unity of religion and politics but balanced by drawing on elements of Western culture and lifestyle that could facilitate this overall goal.
4. Secularists: assert the separation of religion and politics and making Islam primarily a major element of cultural identity rather than the essence of one's being (*Ibid.*: 82).

Chandra Muzaffar describes the resurgence of Islam as 'the espousal of an Islamic alternative as a challenge to the dominant social systems (Muzaffar, 1986: 5)'. It is more that mere 're-assertion' which connotes insistence upon one's position or 'revivalism', which carries the idea of 'returning to the past and a desire to revive what is antiquated (*Ibid.*)'.

Muzaffar lists down the main characteristics of the Islamic resurgence which began in the Middle East and South Asia, and has won adherents in Malaysia and Indonesia:

1. A fervent belief that society should be organized on the basis of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (the way of the Prophet);
2. An explicit recognition that the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* lay out a complete way of life whose sanctity and purity should not be tarnished by new interpretations influenced by time and circumstances.
3. The establishment of an educational system directed towards the creation of ethical human beings as an alternative to the functional, utilitarian type of education available in most Muslim countries.
4. The rejection of Western civilization because the secularization of life, the subversion of eternal values, and the pervasive growth of materialism are all indications that Western civilization which has long been in a state of crisis is on the verge of collapse.
5. The dethronement of the West as a civilization because its models of growth and social change negate man, subordinating the human being to materialistic goals and desires (*Ibid.*: 9-11).

Muzaffar believes that the Islamic resurgence can make a substantial impact in helping to 'nurture "God consciousness" among secular elites both in the West and the East (*Ibid.*: 29)'. He refers to the shaping of a new human person: 'The Islamic conception of God is particularly suited to the

task of making modern man, with his emphasis upon rationality, aware of the importance of believing in a transcendental reality because it is so intimately linked to reason. For it is not mere faith which is expected to convince man of the existence of God but his own observations of the workings of nature, the process involved in the biological conception of the human being, the physiological structure of man, the specificity and variety in animal and plant life, and the pattern of growth, decay and death in all life-forms (*Ibid.*: 29)'.

Muzaffar states that God's message for mankind is contained in the rise and fall of human civilization which coincides with either the consolidation or erosion of social values: 'The *Qur'an* argues that all these phenomena are the signs of God. The whole of creation with all its complexities and the entire gamut of human activity manifest the power of God. Thus, to understand God one has to study man, nature and society. This helps to establish a link between God and scientific investigation (*Ibid.*: 29-20)'.

The sentiment that society should be organized on the basis of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (the way of the Prophet) is manifested in greater consciousness of proper Islamic attire, rejection of night clubs, gambling and consumption of alcohol, faithful observance of daily prayers, and restrained attitude towards the opposite sex (*Ibid.*: 8-10).

Amid the wave of Islamic fervor is a voice of moderation in the person of Nurcolish Madjid, an Indonesian Muslim scholar and political leader. He underscores the link between the principle of brotherhood of Muslims (*Ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*) and the principle that all mankind are brothers. He believes that the division of mankind into races and religions 'must be borne in a broader humanitarian environment with an attitude of absolute mutual respect (Madjid, 2004: 74). He lays stress on the admonition of the *Qur'an* that "God alone has the right to measure and determine someone's worth, whereas a man must appraise other men in the spirit of equality (*Ibid.*: 74-75)".

4. RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON POLITICS AND STATE PRACTICE

4.1. *The Buddhist Countries*

In the four predominantly Theravada Buddhist countries – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand, Buddhism plays an important role in daily life and statecraft. For the majority population, being a Buddhist is part

and parcel of their ethnic identity. To be Khmer, to be Lao, to be Burmese and to be Thai is to be Buddhist. But it is Thailand's constitutional monarchy that comes closest to a traditional Buddhist state (Suksamran, 1993: 107-137). Buddhist monks continue to play an active role in Thai society. The most recent display of their involvement was when they demonstrated against the registration of a beer company in the stock market.

The Thai Buddhist text, *Traiphuum Phra Ruang*, has had an enduring influence on Thai political thought (Jackson, 1993: 67-68). It includes references to the *Buddha-rajā* and idealizes Sukkhotai, which was the first Thai kingdom under benevolent Buddhist monarch, Ram Khamhaeng. Peter Jackson believes that the *Traiphuum Phra Ruang* continues to have political significance even after King Mongkut (Rama IV) initiated a rationalist interpretation of traditional Buddhist teachings. He points out that since the late fifties, there have been attempts by political conservatives to reaffirm the link between the *Traiphuum* and the exercise of political authority (*Ibid.*: 77).

Since the mid-1970s, the reformists have provided their own progressive, rationalist interpretations in order to counter the conservatives. In their goal to promote democratization in governance, they have highlighted the egalitarian qualities of the Sukhotai kingdom of Ram Khamheng, the first Thai monarch who applied Buddhist principles (Suksamran, 1993: 110). They have also de-emphasized the role of *khamma* and have stressed the promise of *Nibbana* (Jackson, 1993: 80-86).

Buddhism plays a legitimating function to the present day. In his speeches, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has always referred to Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, an advocate for a more politically engaged form of Buddhist practice (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2004: 85, 136-138, 214). Buddhadasa, who passed away in 1993, asserted that Buddhists have the duty to improve the present world, rather than merely accumulating merit for the next life. He presented the idea of 'dhammic socialism' that would cleanse society. He believed that such a political system must be ruled by those who had detached themselves from ego and materialism (*Ibid.*: 136-137).

Prime Minister Thaksin favors *kan mueang ning* or quiet politics (*Ibid.*: 139), over contentious political debate. In his thinking, 'calm politics' conforms more to the Buddhist notion of moral leadership: 'Buddhadasa saw that politics is *thamma* and *thamma* is politics. Politics is a duty. Politics is organizing the mass of people in society to live together, without crime. Politics which has *thamma* is the politics of men of moral integrity (*satthaburut*). He (Buddhadasa) said that parliament should be an assem-

bly of men of moral integrity, or an assembly of politicians who have *thamma*. But if parliamentarians argue, exchange abuse, and attack one another, just protecting their own interests, it should not be called a parliament in Buddhadasa's sense (quoted in *Ibid.*: 137).

4.2. *The Muslim Countries*

The Constitution of Brunei Darussalam declares Islam as the state religion and provides that 'the Head of the religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be His Majesty the Sultan and *Yang Di-Pertuan* (Head of State)'. Since the 14th century, the title of the Sultan of Brunei has passed within the same dynasty. The present Sultan, His Majesty Hassanal Bolkiah, is both the head of state and head of government. There is a Religious Council that advises the Sultan on religious matters. While Brunei's legal system is based on English common law, Shari'a law, which applies to Muslims, supersedes civil law in family matters and a number of other areas.

In Malaysia, almost 60% of the population are Muslim. According to its Constitution, the official religion is Islam, 'but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation'. It is also provided that 'in every State other than States not having a Ruler the position of the Ruler as the Head of the religion of Islam in his State in the manner and to the extent acknowledged and declared by the Constitution, all rights, privileges, prerogatives and powers enjoyed by him as Head of that religion, are unaffected and unimpaired; but in any acts, observance or ceremonies with respect to which the Conference of Rulers has agreed that they should extend to the Federation as a whole each of the other Rulers shall in his capacity of Head of the religion of Islam authorize the Yang di-pertuan Agong to represent him'.

The character of governance in Malaysia has largely been shaped by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who, as Prime Minister of Malaysia for 22 years (1981-2003), adopted an open-minded approach to the application of Islam. In his book, *Islam and the Muslim Ummah* (2003), he deplores the practice of politicians to interpret the Qur'an and to casually label other Muslims as 'infidels' for not supporting their political parties or their politically motivated interpretations of Islam (Mahathir Mohamad, 2003: 173). He criticizes the misuse of Islamic concepts like *jihad* by certain extremist groups: 'Their way will only lead to more and deeper schism amongst the Muslims, retarding their progress and perpetuating their oppression by others. True jihad is the struggle for Muslim unity, acquisition of Muslim

statecraft, knowledge and skills so that the Muslims will be freed of oppression and be able to take their place as successful members of a regenerated Muslim civilization (*Ibid.*: 62)'.

Dr. Mahathir refers to three passages from the Qur'an as proofs of Islam's spirit of tolerance and forgiveness: 'Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just (*Al Mumtahinah* (60): 8)'. 'It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou has taken a decision put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him) (*Ali 'Imran* (3): 159). To you your religion, and to me my religion (*Al Kafirun* (109): 6)'.

Dr. Mahathir emphasizes that the Constitution of Medina was way ahead of its time, encouraging cooperation and solidarity among Muslims, Christians, Jews and adherents of other faiths. 'It ensured freedom, including freedom of worship as well as equality and justice for all (*Ibid.*: 107)'.

In 2001, his announcement that Malaysia was in fact an Islamic state precipitated a national political discourse (Martinez, 2004: 29-48). It did serve the purpose of neutralizing the rival Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), which sought the support of the Muslim majority.

The PAS was originally established by members of the Religion Department (*Biro Agama*) of the United Muslim Nationalist Organization (UMNO) who were disenchanted with the secularism of that party in the early 1950's. PAS was the ruling party in two provinces on the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula – Terengganu Province from 1959 to 1961 and Kelantan Province from 1959 to 1977. In the general elections of 1990 and 1995, it formed a coalition with the Spiritual Party Year 46 (later renamed the Malay Spiritual Party Year 46) and controlled several provincial governments.

The ultimate goal of the party is to build an Islamic state that governs through *shari'ah* or Islamic law. In the general elections of 2004, PAS garnered only seven parliamentary seats, a significant decrease from the 27 parliamentary seats that it had in 1999. It lost control of Terengganu, but retained its dominance in Kelantan, with a slim majority of 24 out of 45 seats.

Let us now proceed to examine the situation in Indonesia, the Muslim country in Southeast Asia that has been in the limelight in recent years. It has the world's largest Muslim population (almost 90% of its population of 215,960,000). But because the country has sizeable non-

Muslim minorities, it has a secular constitution that did not adopt Islam as the official religion.

Bahtiar Effendy provides his analysis of the perception of *shari'a* among the Muslim majority in his country: 'Being Muslim, they accept the significance of *shari'a* and are obliged to implement Islamic teachings in all aspects of life. Yet they differ greatly with regard to how *shari'a* is to be understood, interpreted, and implemented. They do not believe that Islamic *shari'a* should be adopted in its entirety and serve as the positive law of the land. Instead, they share the idea that certain elements of Islamic *shari'a* can be formulated into legally binding law, such as on issues related to marriage and divorce, inheritance and endowment, *zakat* collection and distribution, the pilgrimage, and the like. The fact that many Muslims feel that the state's accommodation of Islamic law is still limited has not stopped them from struggling within the bounds of the existing system, laws, and regulations (Effendy, 2003: 223-224)'.

The largest Muslim organization in the country is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which was founded by traditional religious scholars (*ulama*) in East Java in 1926. In its active involvement in the building of civil society in Indonesia, the NU has championed the idea of *rahmatan lil'alam* (mercy on the universe), which is a principle of the *Shariah* and is the basis of the NU's advocacy for human rights (Falaakh, 2001: 34). The organization believes that implementing Islamic teachings in Indonesian society requires *pribumisasi* or nativization of Islam (*Ibid.*: 35). Muhamad Fajrul Falaakh, who was chairperson of the executive board of Nahdlatul Ulama, *pribumisasi* entails harmonization with the prevailing social and cultural conditions.

In the struggle for Indonesia's independence in 1945, the NU was affiliated with the Masyumi, the Islamic political party. From 1952 to 1973, it functioned as an independent political party (*Ibid.*: 33). It became part of the United Development Party (PPP) in 1973-1983. It established its own political party, the National Awakening Party (PKB). NU now adopts the vision of the 'three brotherhoods': *akhuwawah Islamiyah*, *ukhuwwah wathaniyyah* and *ukhuwwah basyariyah* – brotherhood among Muslims, among fellow citizens and among human beings (*Ibid.*: 37). It has advocated tolerance towards all ethnic and religious minorities in Indonesia.

Abdurrahman Wahid, who headed NU, became the second President after the fall of President Suharto. He formed the National Awakening Party, PKB., following the dramatic fall of President Suharto. During his

short presidency, Wahid did not favor the Islamization of his country and consistently maintained that one's faith should not be imposed on others.

The other major organization is Muhammadiyah, which was founded in 1912. Its main concern and target has been community development. It is committed to a program of social and religious education within Muslim communities (*dakwah jemaah*), peaceful family life (*keluarga sakinah*), and peaceful and prosperous village life (*qaryah thayyibah*). The organization has been unwilling to change its social and cultural orientation to a political one.

The Islamic values of justice, equality, diligence, honesty and entrepreneurship comprise the Muhammadiyah's ethos. The organization has played a vital role in promoting and enhancing the idea of civil society (*masyarakat madani*) from its early existence to the present time (Abdullah, 2001: 44-46). It belongs to the modernist school which believes in the twin pillars of reason and revelation. According to M. Amin Abdullah, who is one of the vice-chairpersons of the central leadership board of the Muhammadiyah, 'the traditional type of charismatic and paternalistic leadership has been slowly, but surely, relegated and substituted by the modern type of democratic leadership (*Ibid.*: 46)'.

The General Chairman of the Muhammadiyah from 1995 to 1999 was Amien Rais. In the 2004 presidential elections, he ran under the banner of the National Mandate Party, an open political party which had Muslim as well as non-Muslim candidates. He was unsuccessful in his bid for the presidency but remains a respected political leader.

According to Effendy, political Islam in Indonesia is not aspiring for the establishment of an Islamic state. Cognizant of the heterogeneity of the country, its proponents 'are working for the development of a socio-political system which reflects, or is in tune with, the general principles of Islamic political values, including justice, consultation, egalitarianism, and participation (Effendy, 2003: 195)'.

Effendy observes that political Islam no longer focuses its efforts to partisan politics but now broadens its activities in partnership with various non-governmental organizations, particularly the NU and Muhammadiyah. He believes that this more integrative approach has shown signs of success: 'Political Islam seems to have found ways to integrate itself into the discourse of Indonesia's national politics. In addition, there are also a number of indications which suggest that the state is beginning to see political Islam not as a threat, but as a complementary force in the country's national development (*Ibid.*)'.

Conclusions

In our study of the fundamental teachings of Theravada Buddhism and Islam, we can arrive at the following conclusions:

1. Theravada Buddhism is premised on non-egoity. It does not have a counterpart of Christianity's Genesis. Instead, *kamma* is the governing force that determines the circumstances of one's past, present and future forms and quality of existence. Theravada Buddhism offers an ethical system that teaches that life is all suffering and that the cycle of birth, death and rebirth can be ended through the obliteration of desire. Through pure thoughts and good conduct, one frees himself from *kamma* and *samsara*, and eventually achieves *Nibbana*.
2. Islam presents a doctrine of Creation, in which an Almighty God called Allah, created man from clay, signifying mankind's mortality. Allah breathed life into His creation, bestowing upon him His Divine qualities and embodying man's perfectibility. In contrast to Buddhism, every individual created by Allah has an identity. He is accountable to Allah who dispenses justice, which is the end-purpose of Creation.
3. The destiny and character of the human person in both religions are largely predetermined. In Theravada Buddhism, it is one's *kamma*, which is generated by his past deeds, that shapes what he is now and coupled with what he does now, what he will progressively become in this life as well as in the next. The more liberal Theravada Buddhists tend to emphasize the promise of *Nibbana* over the burden of *kamma*.
4. Islam teaches that God has designed the fate of every human being. There are schools of thought in Islam, which assert that man has free will to balance his predestination, but they still believe that Allah in His omniscience, knows what choices his human creations will make.
5. The worthlessness of life, the illusory nature of all reality, and the insignificance of individual existence may give the wrong impression that Theravada Buddhism does not accord value to human rights. They could lend credence to claims that since one's suffering in this present life is a product of his *kamma*, respect for his individual rights cannot alleviate his misfortune. On the contrary, human rights are intrinsic in Theravada Buddhism. It teaches the equality of and compassion for every being and abhors violence and any form of

abuse. The Theravada scriptures also make references to the importance that the Buddha gave to democratic practices.

6. Like Theravada Buddhism, Islam also subscribes to human rights, tolerance, good governance and peace. While Islam requires complete submission to Allah and acceptance of His omnipotence and His predetermined design for everyone, it recognizes the equality and dignity of every person. Respect for the individual and compassion for the poor proceed from the premise that men and women have been accorded by Allah the highest status and the most perfect form among His creatures.
7. Concepts of the ideal state in the two religions are derived from their fundamental doctrines. The ideal ruler for Theravada Buddhism is one who brings about conditions that will enable the people to abide by the *Dhamma* so that they will have greater opportunity to reach *Nibbana*.
8. Among Buddhist societies in contemporary Southeast Asia, it is only in Thailand where religion is institutionalized in the political system, in the person of the constitutional monarch. Being the symbol of both Buddhism and the nation, the King is the object of reverence by his people.
9. Conservative Muslims uphold the orthodox model of the Islamic state, in which the Islamic law, *shari'a*, encompasses every sphere of life – political, social, economic and cultural. Secularist and modernist Muslims, for their part, are open to adaptation to the requirements of contemporary society and the creative incorporation of Western principles of governance.
10. Among the predominantly Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, it is the state practice of Brunei Darussalam that comes closest to Islam. The political institutions and political dynamics of Indonesia and Malaysia have also been significantly influenced by Islam.
11. All Southeast Asian countries, except Timor Leste, are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Association indirectly serves as a bridge among the civilizations and religions of a region. ASEAN countries have enriched their indigenous cultures with influences from China, India as well as the Arabic and Western worlds. ASEAN has also provided an enduring framework for peacefully resolving conflicts among member-countries and with extra-regional countries. The declarations and treaties of the organization have developed the international practice of member countries, having accustomed them to the culture of peace.

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